Two Kinds of Tears

by Gary W. Cantor

I remember the darkness of the night. There wasn't a star in the sky, and there were no passing cars to help light up the street. To make things worse, both the street lamp in front of my apartment building and the light above the building's entrance were out.

I shrugged my shoulders and walked into the old gray structure. Then, I climbed the stairs up to the third floor, opened the door to my apartment, and after groping around for a while in the dark, managed to find a light switch and lit up the hallway. Then I did the same thing in the living room.

My apartment was like those of most bachelors, I suppose. Small, drab, and colorless, it was definitely in need of a woman's touch.

I sat down on the couch and turned on the TV. Then, I went into the kitchen, got a beer, and came back and looked for something good to watch. But, there wasn't anything worthwhile, so I turned off the TV and just sat around and drank my beer. I was down, or maybe it would be more accurate to say that I was a wreck.

My mother had died two weeks earlier, and for almost the entire two-week period I had been bombarded by an endless stream of grieving relatives who seemed to always burst into tears upon seeing me. But, as bad as that was, that wasn't why I was a wreck. I was a wreck because nothing happened to me. By that I mean that I felt no great sense of loss, and I couldn't handle that lack of feeling. I mean, what kind of a person was I, I wondered. I had just lost my mother and I wasn't touched. What was wrong with me?

This is what I was thinking about as I sat drinking my beer. And it led me to think about my mother as well as my father, and my relationships with the two of them. Actually, these thoughts had been with me ever since I heard that my mother died, and I couldn't get rid of them. They swirled around in my head and made me feel as dizzy as I had been when I was a kid riding on a merry-go-round...

Mom was always good to me....Why can't I feel something and break down?...We didn't have a bad relationship....No, that's right. We didn't have a relationship at all....And that's because of dad....I felt so much for dad that it wasn't possible for me to feel anything for mom....But isn't that natural?...Mom and I were so different, and dad and I were so similar....Dad and I were always on the same wavelength. We liked the same things, had the same opinions, and were always together....At the park, at ball games, in his study having chats....Mom and I had nothing in common....We had absolutely nothing in common....How could two people be so different?...Still, I should feel something....She was my mother....What's wrong with me?...When dad died, I fell apart. I felt as if I had lost a part of myself....Now, I feel nothing....Nothing....There are no two ways about it. I am a cold,

disgusting human being....Oh, how God must hate me....But why should I feel something?...We were so different....So very different....Were we really mother and son?...

This involuntary self-analysis was tiresome, and so, once again, with nothing else to do, I turned on the TV and searched for a diversion. However, it seemed hopeless. I tried watching a sitcom for a while, but then realized that it was just making me more depressed. I wasn't sure if it was me or the show, but nothing about it seemed funny. So, I turned the channel again and again, and finally stopped when I got to what appeared to be an old movie. It was in black-and-white, and a few seconds after I started watching, the famous actor, Gregory Peck, appeared on the screen. A minute or so later, I realized that the movie had to be *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

I had never seen the movie before, but I knew that it was famous because I had heard so many people talk about it and praise it over the years. And indeed, from the moment I started watching, I found the film, which was set in the deep south in the 1930s, to be incredibly moving. Gregory Peck played a lawyer in the movie, and in a long courtroom scene, he put on an absolutely magnificent performance. In that scene, the lawyer displayed flawless logic and brilliant oratorical skills in order to defend his client, a poor black man, from an obviously false charge of rape. However, despite the lawyer's brilliant and utterly convincing performance, the jury, obviously motivated solely on the basis of prejudice, returned a verdict of guilty.

At the end of that scene, when the lawyer walked out of the courtroom all by himself, I felt my body shake and then I exhaled deeply. That scene had given me a feeling that was an odd combination of sadness, anger, and awe. I was in awe of the brilliance and passion of the lawyer, was saddened by the plight of the defendant, and was angry that people could so easily act on the basis of blind prejudice.

However, as tormenting as that scene was, I found myself overcome by what was to follow. For in the next scene, the lawyer, who had planned to appeal the case, was informed that his client had been shot and killed while trying to escape from the authorities. And so, as sad as he was, the lawyer then had to go and tell his client's family about his shocking death.

At that point, I was totally engrossed in the film and found myself anticipating with great interest the remainder of the story. However, just then, something happened that turned my thoughts in a different direction. And that something was the sensation of a teardrop that rolled slowly down my cheek. I quickly wiped the tear away with the back of my hand, but as I did I remembered something. It was a memory from my childhood, and it reminded me of something that I had long forgotten. The memory was visual, and as it appeared ever so clearly before my eyes I found myself less and less conscious of the movie that I had been watching with such interest.

In the memory, I was about six or seven years old and had been home from school because of a cold. At first, I was upstairs, but then I walked from my bedroom to the stairway and then headed slowly down the stairs in search of my mother. I was thirsty and wanted something to drink...

"Mom," I yelled out. "Mom! Where are you? I'm thirsty."

"I'm in here," I heard my mother say.

I went into the living room, and saw my mother lying down on the couch. She was crying,

and was wiping her tears with a piece of tissue paper.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

My mother turned to me and I could see that her eyes were all red.

"This movie is so sad I can't help crying," she said. And then she sniffled.

At that point I noticed for the first time that the TV was on.

"You're crying because of a movie?" I asked incredulously. I had never heard of such a thing.

"Yes," my mother answered. "I often cry when I watch movies. And this one is so sad. Oh, I can't believe how sad it is."

I thought that it was ridiculous. Why would a movie make someone cry? I shrugged my shoulders in disbelief, and then went into the kitchen to get some orange juice...

And that was it. The memory disappeared and I once again became aware of the story that had continued to unfold on the TV screen. However, I was no longer in the mood to watch. I turned the TV off and thought. Then, within moments, I realized that tears had once again welled up in my eyes, and at that point something completely overpowered me and I cried like a baby for at least five minutes.

When the crying finally stopped, I felt better than I had felt for a long time. And then, all of a sudden, an interesting thought popped into my head. Dad, I remembered, never cried. I had never seen him cry.